

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Upon entry of this amendment, Claims 1-26, 29-42, and 44-48 remain in this application. Claims 1, 41-42, and 47-48 have been amended herein. Claims 27 and 28 were previously canceled. Claim 43 is canceled herein. Claims 13-26, 29-37, and 44-46 stand withdrawn.

1. Drawings

Formal drawings (9 sheets) were included with the Letter to the Draftsperson and mailed on January 15, 2003. Applicants have respectfully requested that Examiner indicate the acceptability of the drawings in the next office communication. Examiner has indicated receipt of the drawings on this Office Action but has not indicated whether the drawings are accepted by the Examiner.

Applicants include herewith an additional replacement sheet to replace previously submitted sheet 1 (including Fig. 1) where further reference numerals are added to structure now claimed in Claim 1, 41-42, and 47-48. In particular, the reference numerals 120A, 120B have been added in Fig. 1. These refer, respectively, to the lower surface 120A and upper surface 120B of the top plate 120. No new matter is added.

Examiner is hereby asked to indicate whether the drawings are accepted in the next office communication.

2. Specification

The specification has been amended, as shown in the amended paragraphs above, to clarify and make explicit in the specification, certain aspects which are shown in the drawings. In particular, an explicit description of the relationship of the top plate 120 and the upper 120B and lower 120A surfaces thereof to the muffle 110 and to the washer 174 have been added into the specification. No new matter is added in that the Applicant has described that which is now being claimed, but which was previously explicitly shown in all embodiments of the drawings. Additionally, "exit opening" has been changed to "central opening" in the claims (see page 4, line 30 for support). Accordingly, the objections to the specification should be withdrawn.

3. §103 Rejections

Examiner has rejected Claims 1-12, 38-43 and 47-48 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 2000-44269 (or Koaizawa 6,543,257) in view of Drouart 5,931,984, Kaiser 4,030,901, Ryoji JP 02212325, Gilbreath 6,447,017, Haney 4,347,069 and Collins 5,408,865.

Respectfully, the combination claimed in Claims 1, 41-42, and 47-48 is not taught or suggested by the cited references. First, Examiner states that it would be obvious to

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replace the o-ring system of Koaizawa with the sealing washer of Ryoji. Respectfully, this reasoning is flawed. The reason is that these are not equivalent sealing systems. The o-ring system of Koaizawa completely seals the upper end of the furnace while exhaust gas exits through port 10 formed in the muffle tube. Ryoji is a leaky system allowing some exhaust gas to exit around the washer. Thus, because they are not equivalent sealing systems, one would not be motivated to switch one for the other. In particular, it should be recognized that the intended function (complete sealing) of Koaizawa would be destroyed. The apparatus combination claimed provides a simple and cost effective system where reasonably good sealing is achieved at the upper end of the furnace, while the ill effects of air leakage are mitigated by the use of the flow restrictor.

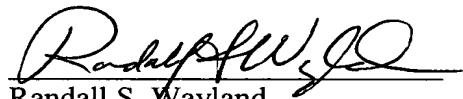
4. Conclusion

Based upon the above amendments, remarks, and papers of records, Applicants believe the pending claims of the above-captioned application are in allowable form and patentable over the prior art of record. Applicants respectfully request that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case.

Applicants believe that no extension of time is necessary to make this Reply timely. Should Applicants be in error, Applicants respectfully request that the Office grant such time extension pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 1.136(a) as necessary to make this Reply timely, and hereby authorize the Office to charge any necessary fee or surcharge with respect to said time extension to the deposit account of the undersigned firm of attorneys, Deposit Account 03-3325.

Please direct any questions or comments to Randall S. Wayland at 607-974-0463.

Respectfully submitted,



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Amendment to the Drawings:

The attached sheet of drawings includes changes to Fig. 1. This sheet (sheet 1), which includes Fig. 1, replaces original sheet including Fig. 1. In Fig. 1, numerals 120A and 120B have been added to identify, respectively, the lower surface and upper surface of the top plate 120.